



Equity in U.S. Fisheries

With the ocean increasingly viewed as a frontier for economic development, small-scale fishermen, Indigenous peoples, women, and other minority groups are at risk for disproportionate harm and inequitable distribution of benefits across fisheries and throughout coastal communities.

Ocean Strategies combined equity scholar research within and outside ocean uses and marine resources to develop this fact sheet. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to open the door to more conversations and lay the groundwork for policies that bolster industry needs, expand the commercial fishing workforce and help ocean-dependent communities thrive.

Ocean equity: a concerted study of how the ocean is used and how equitably its benefits are shared.

The **10 most commonly studied ocean inequities** include:

- 1.** dispossession, displacement, and ocean grabbing
- 2.** environmental justice concerns from pollution and waste
- 3.** environmental degradation and reduction of ecosystem services
- 4.** livelihood impacts for small-scale fishers
- 5.** lost access to marine resources needed for food security and well-being
- 6.** inequitable distribution of economic benefits
- 7.** social and cultural impacts
- 8.** marginalization of women
- 9.** human and Indigenous rights abuses
- 10.** exclusion from governance

There are **three primary dimensions of equity** to be considered in interventions and approaches: recognitional, procedural, and distributional equity. These dimensions allow us to organize our thinking and better understand inequity, though causes contributing to inequities are multifaceted and each facet may be characterized through a different one of the three dimensions. All to say, the three dimensions interact and propel one another.

- **Recognitional equity (whose voice matters):** the acknowledgment and incorporation of the rights, tenure, cultural identities, practices, values, visions, knowledge systems, and livelihoods of different stakeholders and actors in conservation governance, planning, and management.
- **Procedural equity (who is involved in decision-making):** the inclusion and effective participation of all relevant actors and groups in rule- and decision-making; accountability for conservation policies and programs; and systemic transparency.
- **Distributional equity (who wins or loses):** the level of fairness in the distribution of benefits, rights, costs, responsibilities, and risks between different groups, including current and future generations.

Guiding principles to categorize U.S. fisheries equity issues:

Improving **recognitional equity** in domestic fisheries starts with recognition of:

- Human rights under international and national law
- Statutory and customary rights
- Rights of Indigenous peoples, including Free, Prior and Informed Consent and self-determination
- All relevant actors and their diverse interests, capacities, and influence
- Different identities, cultures knowledge systems, values, and institutions

Improving **procedural equity** in domestic fisheries starts with:

- Full and effective participation of all relevant actors in decision-making
- Transparency supported by timely access to relevant information in appropriate forms
- Accountability for fulfilling responsibilities, and other actions and inactions
- Access to justice, including an effective dispute-resolution process and procedures for seeking redress

Improving **distributional equity** in domestic fisheries starts with:

- Identification and assessment of the distribution and impacts of costs, benefits, and risks
- Effective measures to mitigate negative impacts on Indigenous peoples and local communities
- Benefits equitably shared among relevant actors based on one or more targeting options

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